

The first word: an introduction

by the editors

This new issue of *Jump Cut*, fat and sassy as ever, has many interconnections between its essays. We do not usually write an introduction to an issue, like a preface to a book, but we find so many conceptual ties between these essays, beyond those indicated by their groupings in the table of contents, that we would like to point some of these out. If, in fact, the description of some article piques your interest, a hotlink will take you directly to it. In addition to the fact that the essays speak to each other in a remarkable way, this issue marks a new level of visuality. Writers submitting to *Jump Cut* now often think beforehand about how certain images might best accompany their work, and in a number of cases the essays here are accompanied by visual essays apart from the text. Also exceptional in this collection of essays is the way that, on a theoretical level, authors often provide a useful, cogent précis of the most salient literature applicable to the media under consideration, and many of the essays themselves make important new contributions to cultural theory and history. And, as always, by reading essays from many countries, our readers will learn about new films, often outside the Hollywood system, and new takes on films and television programs they might have already seen. Furthermore, with *Jump Cut*'s ongoing emphasis on media's social context and use in political activism, many of the current articles discuss activist media both historically and in its current manifestations, especially as activists use cell phone and Internet communication.

We have organized the [table of contents to issue 54](#) by geographical area, genre, and theme. However, that organization is reductive and does not acknowledge many other themes and concerns that essays focus on. Such themes include gender, globalization, history, political activism, racial representation, cinematic form, genre—especially melodrama, and the Internet and new media. In addition, although one section bears the title, “Institutions: law, production, and exhibition,” other essays scattered throughout the issue also offer important ways to rethink media institutions both past and present.

Gender

The first, and perhaps most salient tie between the essays is that many writers focus on aspects of race and/or gender and use these social reference points for case studies of relevant media—or vice versa, they use selected media examples to provide critical insights into these still problematic social areas. For example, many of the essays interweave a consideration of gender, as narrativized in film and television, and specific national and local conditions shaping both gender expectations and women's opportunities and desires within their specific social contexts. In this light, three of the essays dealing with Chinese media—by [Amanda Weiss](#), [Jenny Kwok Wah Lau](#), and [Wing Shan Ho](#)—explore in detail how Chinese narrative fictions articulate clashes between old and new values, changes in the family, and women's desires and economic possibilities in a contemporary, globalized, Chinese economy. Looking at an older tradition in India, [Srimati Mukherjee](#) explores how a contemporary adaptation of a Tagore novel reveals how Bengali widows, exemplified by the protagonist, still have only a limited framework within which to express sexual desire and social agency. And turning to the genre of contemporary documentary, [Daniel Miller](#) describes the making and impact of one longitudinal, lyrical documentary from Indonesia that also treats this kind of generational shift from rural to urban, from traditional values to a consumer culture, finally encapsulated in the problems and desires of one teen girl of the third generation who does not understand or embrace what her older family members knew or endured.

Considering gender across the various platforms of film, television, and the Internet, and various levels of media text and media reception, four essays on queer media employ a variety of theoretical approaches. Presenting Michelle Citron's interactive narrative quartet, [Queer Feast](#), [Kathleen Scott](#) introduces an important queer work that the artist has made available for free on the Internet. Michelle Citron is perhaps best known for her experimental film *Daughter Rite*, one of the classics of 70s second wave feminism. *Queer Feast* has some of the characteristics of that film. Again Citron uses many forms of image capture; mixes documentary, fiction, and autobiography; and challenges her viewers to construct narrative meanings as they follow different interactive choices that will vary from viewer to viewer. Scott uses Judith Butler's concept of performativity to describe both the on-screen media and the effect of viewers having to construct their own experience. The political significance of this work lies in the narrative "matrices formed by the intersections of desire, the power dynamics of gender performativity, identity formation, and assimilation."

In contrast to the privacy of Internet browsing is the most public kind of queer viewership, that of queer film festivals. [Ger Zielinski](#) uses

Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia to describe the functions and varied effects of such festivals—heterotopia referring a space apart, perhaps marginalized, but socially endowed with a certain meaning both by its inhabitants—brief though that may be—and by mainstream society. Zielinski describes the social aspects of attending a festival from standing in line and buying tickets and seeing who's there, to the kind of films/video seen and the logic of their programming, to possible disruption by state authorities especially in repressive cultures. As Zielinski analyzes it, the queer film festival is a varied and contested space. Its contemporary international proliferation not only provides for gay visibility but often becomes the locus of an open political struggle.

Considering ways that genres can become queered, three essays take up specific texts and analyze how they develop queer characters, queer themes, and queer texts or subtexts. [Whitney Monaghan](#) discusses how *Glee*, a teen television series with many queer characters has many opportunities to develop coming out stories, so that the show can deal more fully than many other dramas do with shifts in individuals' identities and different moments of "out-ness." With a slasher film as a text, *Jeepers Creepers 2*, [Patrick Bingham](#) extends Harry Benshoff's arguments about homosexuality and the horror film to explore the complex relation between the slasher film, (homo)sexuality, and monstrosity. And [Nicholas de Villiers](#) shows how *RuPaul's Drag Race* —a queer reality show that cites and parodies *Paris Is Burning*, *America's Next Top Model*, and *Project Runway*—can have a special meaning for the savvy fan. In the show, drag becomes citation yet its depiction also passes on queer culture in a hypermediated way.

Globalization

It is striking in this issue of *Jump Cut* how many authors analyze media from an international perspective, both in terms of the texts they deal with and the fact that most media cross national lines. For example, two writers dealing with Asian media offer new and important perspectives on both national and globalized media structures and institutions, as well as consider narrative themes within dramas that depict globalization. In particular, the monograph by [Manjunath Pendakur](#) is a groundbreaking study of how malls, multiplexes, and digital cinemas have reshaped India's national film industry. He details the political economy of current distribution and exhibition strategies in India, where high-end, enclosed malls in urban areas have become an entertainment "destination" for families and youth while single screen theaters still serve poorer neighborhoods and more rural areas. We have personally seen how this change has affected film going in Seoul and Hong Kong, and now Pendakur invites *Jump Cut*'s international readers to compare the Indian example with their own countries. Certainly this essay serves as a model for future

studies, more of which we would like to see published in *Jump Cut*. Pendakur also points out how producing films for an international diasporic market of Indians abroad has reshaped Hindi film production both in terms of content and profit.

Also demonstrating a specific model which could be applied to other countries, [Wing Shan Ho](#) describes in detail how a Chinese television series, *Narrow Dwelling*, uses a melodramatic form to deal with contemporary women's problems, especially through narrative lines that focus on how urbanites find housing. In practical and political terms, the series can offer a social critique by placing its characters' problems against the background of China's neoliberal real estate development and property market. By focusing on a story about women, the producers could promote the script and later the finished program to national censors as having a "contemporary city theme," and thus escape official rejection as either a crime drama or an explicit political critique.

The theme of globalization both as a motif internal to the film narratives and as a structuring element in media making and distribution, as well as in state policy about the media, is taken up by many of the essays in this issue, including the ones I have just discussed above. Offering a perceptive history and analysis of the Iraq war, [Patricia Ventura](#) also details what she calls its "practicalities," including how troops are trained, supported by contractors and represented in mainstream culture. Fetishizing the soldier, she writes, has deterred people from mobilizing against the war, since the dominant motif is "support our troops," a call that promotes the constant militarization needed to maintain U.S. neoliberal capitalism. With a close analysis of the documentary *Gunner Palace*, Ventura demonstrates its formal similarity to the television show *Cops*.

Two authors analyze the narratives and potential effects of feature fictions that explicitly take up themes of globalization in their scripts. [Kfir Cohen](#) describes *Syriana*'s interweaving narrative strands, and the final perplexity the viewer feels while also sensing that the film has "taught something" about globalization. Cohen points out that this effect on audiences occurs because the narrative strands have demonstrated how global corporations have financialized every aspect of daily life. As Cohen puts it, corporations no longer just influence the political sphere but have led to the economic becoming the political. Also taking up a feature fiction film with interweaving narrative strands that explicitly incorporate "globalization" as a theme, [Leisa Rothlisberger](#) analyzes *Babel* both in terms of how the film portrays victimization and the film's status as an international co-production. Like Ventura and Cohen, Rothlisberger calls for more progressive media to address the hierarchies perpetuated by global networks, what she calls the "uneven logic of border crossing."

Taking up a similar theme but with an older film, a pioneering documentary on consumption, production, and the international food trade is [Audrey Evrard](#)'s analysis of Luc Moullet's *Origins of a Meal/Genèse d'un repas* (1978). Evrard points out that while many contemporary documentaries find their villain in corporate interests, as Moullet travels the world to film France's international food trade, he finds that food's globalization is a perfected form of colonialism—in effect, France's working class benefits from the exploitation as does the middle class, and by implication the viewers of the film. Just as Moullet developed a perspective on an international problem from inside the country affected by it, so does Julio García Espinosa in a fictional film, this time about Cuba's relation to the exile community in Miami. [Mariana Johnson](#) presents the *Reina y Rey*, a melodrama from contemporary Cuba that explicitly transforms the returning exile into the tourist, as former house owners return to try to recruit their old servant Reina to return to Miami with them as a nanny. Johnson describes the changes in Cuba after the Special Period, i.e., the breakup of the Soviet Union and the loss of Russian economic support, and also how the Cubans have changed in their attitude toward emigrés to the United States, seeing them now as potentially bringing money back to Cuba. She finds the film a wry comment on life in Cuba today.

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